

THE \$15 MILLION GAMBLE

FILM PRODUCER RICHARD COBRITZ TALKS TO PAUL FISCHER ABOUT THE MAKING OF *ALIEN NATION*

Paul Fischer: You studied for an Arts degree at university. What drew you to the film industry?

Just going to movies as a youngster. That was the infancy of television and that's all there was; the movies.

PF: Was it difficult to break into film production, being such a competitive industry?

RK: I think that anybody who breaks into this business and succeeds to any degree has got to have a very unique way to tell a particular story. It's true that the competition is very keen, because there's still gold to be picked up on the streets, and any occupation offers real potential.

PF: Do you believe that you've picked up a lot of gold along the way?

RK: I've done OK. I mean, anybody who can do a picture a year, which is what I do, I think can safely say that he's made a little niche for himself in this business.

PF: Having spent a lot of time working in television, what are some of the fundamental differences between film and television?

RK: The pace and the budget. In television, it goes about three times as fast for about a third of the money and the whole process is speeded up. And if the end result is not as satisfying as a theatrical picture, it's still a great working experience. With television, a 20-day schedule buys you a movie-of-the-week here. 45-60 days buys you the equivalent length feature in a theatre. So you can see that not only is it more costly, but the chance of, in any way, getting quality is going to happen at a theatrical level, rather than a television level. That's why television is so oriented to the issue and not the visual, because it's something where you can write the pithy speech, the important subject matter, without looking at it in especially visual terms, and usually it will be well received on that level. While a feature, to be successful, has to first be visual, and will make its other points along the way.

PF: How do you set about financing a project?

RK: It depends. Sometimes I buy the book or like the idea and then I usually assign a writer to it, and either I fund him myself, and/or I go to an independent or major depending on what I feel the final cost of the picture is going to be. If



you're over \$8 million it had better be a major studio because not many independents will fund you for that kind of money.

PF: Are budgets escalating with each project?

RK: No, I flip-flop back and forth. I might do a big mainstream picture like *Alien Nation* which was developed privately by myself and the writer, before taking it to Twentieth Century Fox. Right after that we developed something that we're currently finishing called *Fear*, which is a medium-priced (\$7 m) thriller.

PF: What drew you to the idea of *Alien Nation*?

RK: The writer and I are in partnership and he had the idea of doing basically a cop story, but also featuring aliens, to do not only the cop-buddy movie on the one hand, but also sci-fi on the other. The original screenplay, the one that we sold to Fox, was, at the time, the most commercial vehicle that I'd read. I mean it was funny, quirky, action-packed and it had a great relationship. Yet in fact one of the people was an alien. It was something that I hadn't seen before, and he was working on it. I said "I think this will be a very quick sale". As I recall, the script was submitted to our agent on April 1st of 1987 and we had consummated the deal with Fox on the 16th. We started shooting on October 13th of that year.

PF: What was your budget?